

On the Other Side of Cancer

At age 64, an active, healthy, 6'2", 210 lb Richard Spivack went to his doctor for a regular checkup. A blood test led to a sonogram, then an MRI, and finally a liver biopsy, which led to the diagnosis of large B-cell lymphoma with a rearrangement of the MYC gene. Then, it was time to find an oncologist. Through a network of friends, Spivack found a clinical trial with a new treatment for exactly this subtype run by Wyndham Wilson, M.D., Ph.D., and Kieron Dunleavy, M.D.

Spivack began an 18-week course of treatments at the NIH Clinical Center in July 2013. The DA-EPOCH-R treatment runs in six cycles of three weeks. "Part of the treatment consisted of me having a fanny pack strapped on to me full of chemo for five straight days, infused through a catheter placed in my bicep. Every 24 hours, I'd have it refilled," explained Spivack. "Going regularly to the NIH Clinical Center turned out to be a real blessing. I had many days where I was dehydrating and I needed blood infusions and I would just show up there. My whole existence was between my apartment and the hospital."

Spivack met with the medical team after every three-week cycle for review of blood tests and, PET/CT scan results when needed. "In between, I received all kinds of incredible medical care," said



(Photo: Courtesy of Richard Spivack)

Richard Spivack with Sandy Eisen

Spivack. "During my first cycle, I had a very adverse reaction to the chemo and ended up in the hospital for almost three weeks. Top medical specialists—cardiologists, infectious disease doctors—were evaluating me. Night and day, no matter what time it was, I had the best people."

The treatments ended in October 2013 and Spivack's cancer is in remission. He will return to NCI

every four months for the next two years to have scans and blood work, and sit down with the team to evaluate his case. For a subsequent three years, he will be followed at six-month intervals.

"Hearing that I had the Big C—that was the scariest part for me," said Spivack. "Once it was diagnosed and I had a treatment plan, I calmed down. Not once during the whole 18 weeks did I ever doubt what they were doing for me."

"At my very first meeting with Dr. Dunleavy, I asked him flat out what my chances were. You're not going to get to a promise, but he gave me every indication that this was something I could survive and get to the other side of."

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